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REST STOP II
Second Encounter with Billy Johnson *

I had been unusually drowsy -- up late the night before and up early taking care of last minute bills and typing copy for Linda. But it had been nearly a month since I'd been in New Orleans, and I had repeatedly kicked myself for not getting Billy Lee's phone number, address, or license number -- only a mumbled name and not even certain about that. I'd been frustrated for four-and-a-half months, holding what might be important information and not having a clue as to how to pursue it further. I could only continue to research the books and other materials which have appeared in recent years at an encouraging rate. The Jim Marrs book Crossfire, for example, seems excellent, though as thick as the old Sears catalogue. There was also the stack of Xeroxed materials from the National Archives which Mark had given me. I also looked forward to contacting August Lorio, who had filmed the Assassination Records Committee meeting in New Orleans back in late June.

But my eyes kept closing, so I peeled off I-10 into the familiar Gautier Rest Stop. Spotting two black maintenance men working the yards, it crossed

* BILLY WAYNE (Joe) JOHNSON at the Gautier Rest Stop (going West) on September 9, 1995, around 3:00 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.

my mind to ask if they knew Billy Lee and his beat-up yellow clunker of a car.

I had just pulled into one of the parking slots in the roundabout and angled the seat back for a snooze, when a vintage black Datsun two-door pulled into the adjoining space. A grinning man in a maroon ALABAMA CRIMSON TIDE short sleeve pullover got out and came to my window. It took a minute to recognize him, because his hair was pulled back and he looked older. It was Billy Lee Johnson. I determined not to let him get away this time. "Billy Lee Johnson?"

"Uh huh. Only it's Billy Wayne Johnson. Sometimes they call me Billy Joe."

"Well, I came close," I managed, climbing out of the car. "Usually I'm bad remembering names." We shook hands. "Boy, am I glad to see you. Been thinking about you a lot."

"I seen you drive in."

"Been askin' about you. Looking for your yellow car."

"I traded it in for a pickup and then traded that for this Datsun since I seen you." His tight-lipped smile never wavered.

"Hey," I said, now wide awake, "like to go down to the table there and talk? That's the one we talked at back when."

"Sure," he replied, and took a few steps in that direction. I noted his paunch and baggy pants which I had remembered so vividly from last time.

"Hey, mind if I bring along a pad and a pencil?"

"Nope," he threw back, continuing on down the slope.

"Been coming over here a lot?"

"Haven't been here recently. Just felt like getting out today."

I felt the same sense of excitement as last time, but now I was clearer, more in control, ready. "Want to give me your phone number?"

"Don't have a phone, Jack. But you can take down my address: 3740 Mackeral Drive . . ."

"What Drive?"

"M-a-c-k-e-r-a-l."

"Like the fish."

"Yeah. Gautier, Miss. 39533." I could now see that all his upper teeth were missing.

I gave him my card with "Pensacola" written in, so he'd know where Gulf Breeze was and my N.O. address, explaining there was no phone there.

"Ever get to New Orleans?" I asked.

"Sometimes," he replied.

He looked scruffier today. Had a slight odor as if it had been a while since he'd bathed. The term "street people" went through my mind. Today he looks his age.

"How old did you say you were, Billy?"

"Just turned 50," he said with a kind of shrug.

"Out of all the millions of people in this world, how did you happen to choose me to talk to back in April?"

"Whatta you mean?"

"I mean, somebody who is an 'Assassination freak.' He just kind of looked at me. "You know, who'd studied up; has lots of books and things?"

He shrugged, smiling that tight-lipped smile, and answered a question

about his origins by saying he came from Mississippi. He started coming to N.O. at 15 and moved there after the Navy. Then, out of nowhere, he said, "You know, after I left New Orleans, I could have gone to Hollywood. Had several chances. Wonder what might have happened if I had."

"Like as an actor?"

"Well . . . you know. When I was eighteen, I met Charlton Heston and spent two nights with him in the Presidential Suite of the Monteleon Hotel on Royal. He was in town for . . ."

"Was he making a movie?"

"I guess so."

"The one where he plays somebody historical . . . Andy Jackson, maybe?" *

"Maybe."

"I guess you were a handsome young guy, Billy."

"I was. Only weighed 114. Had a waist like that (shows size with his hands). I was a hustler, but I didn't take up with just anybody. I wasn't like the rest of them. I only took up with men who were intelligent, knew the arts; men with position. They were the only ones interested me."

"Say," I changed the subject, "I looked up Archie Bland. Even went to his antique store, Dixon and Dixon, right?" He nodded. "I didn't say

* I told this to August Lorio who stopped by next afternoon. He said, "That would have been The Buccaneer, C.B. de Mille's last epic. But that was 1958-59 and none of it was shot in N.O. Boring flick! Heston did shoot a film here called Number One -- look it up." (The Buccaneer was released in 1958. It was a "slow, slack and stolid remake of the 1938 film . . . with very obvious studio sets." No 60's film called Number One with Charlton Heston has been found. [Halliwell's Film Guide].)

anything about you, though. Didn't know whether to or not. Nice old man. Went back a couple of more times, but he avoided me."

"I've been in touch with Archie," he said. "Just last week we talked on the phone. Archie's really scared. He went to school with Clay Shaw. They were close. Archie's scared because he knows everything."

"About the Assassination?"

"Yes. We're the last ones, Archie and me. He told everything to Garrison."

"Why didn't Garrison call him to testify?"

"Don't know." He kept his eyes on me.

"Billy, I had sun glasses on last time. Today we can see each other better."

"Yep. Jack, you want to meet Archie? It's easy to arrange. We're still friends. He could show you all that beautiful antique furniture he's got at his place. He's rich. Lives in this big condo where he hides out. It's got a butler, security. Oh, Archie's got statues and a big helmet collection -- helmets from everywhere.** Paintings of foxhunts and things worth thousands . . ."

"Same kind of oversize paintings they've got in the shop . . ."

* Number One (originally entitled Pro), produced by and starring Heston, was partially filmed in New Orleans with members of The Saints, between August and November of 1968, according to The Journal of the Actor's Life, 1956-1976 by Charlston Heston. I find no other indication that he visited New Orleans in these particular journal notes. [Billy Joe Johnson would have been approximately twenty-two years of age at the time, though, presumably living in Atlanta.]

** A close friend recently confirmed Archie's helmet collection.

"Yeah. He lives up on Second Street and Jefferson. We could go see him." *

"You'd call first."

"Oh, sure."

"But he'd be suspicious. He'd recognize me."

Billy suggested, grinning, "You could disguise yourself. Your mustache, maybe . . ."

I was feeling quite free to scribble away, and Billy seemed comfortable with it.

We seemed to have come to the end of one phase of our conversation. There was an easy silence as several cars cruised the roundabout, and the sound of boat motors coming from the river somewhere below. I noticed Billy didn't smoke. I wondered for an instant if he took drugs. Finally, unsure as to what to pursue at this point, I asked, "So you went to the Carolinas when you left New Orleans after the assassination. North or South?"

He looked bewildered. "No. I went to Atlanta. Spent twelve years there. Worked in tile for the [didn't get it] Company. Met Marty Marcello up there. Know who he is? No? He's Carlos Marcello's nephew. Marty already had a lover, but he used to see me on the side a couple of times a week in a hotel. Boy, was he weird. Liked the same stuff Clay Shaw did, but he was even weirder than Shaw. I was only 114 pounds in those days. I was a hustler, but I only associated with men of stature, class. When Clay Shaw died, I changed jobs. I went to North Carolina for only a week or so. I got

* August Lorio says that can't be: Second St. is far from Jefferson and they run in the same direction. But the phone book clearly lists an Archie Bland at 1550 Second St. Phone: (504)899-8703

this one job which gave me enough money to get to Texas and then back to New Orleans. I saw Archie at that time. Then I bought a house in Gautier and went to work with Ingalls Shipbuilders in Pascagoula. Was with them for years. Made enough money to invest in land over there (he points vaguely SE towards the highway) and a nice piece of property over there (points NE towards the marshlands) over facing the Country Club. Nice piece of property. Value just keeps goin' up," he grinned.

"So you made enough money in the shipyards to invest in land."

"Yep. Good money."

"You know, Billy" [I felt quite easy with him now] "you told me a couple of things last time that just don't check out."

"What's that?" he calmly asked.

"Well, Shaw's death for one thing."

"Shaw died of a lung cancer in 1973. Marty [Marcello?] told me Shaw was injected by a male nurse and that induced it. David Ferrell."

"Yes, that's what you said last time. Do mean David Ferrie?"

"Yes, David Ferrell" [teeth problems again?].

"But, Billy, David Ferrie died in 1967, seven years before Shaw died."

He looked at me for a moment without any change of expression at all. Then he calmly said, "Well, find out who the male nurse was. He was a Marine.* [It just occurred to me, maybe such items of info were being relayed

* There was a younger man caring for Shaw in his last days. They were at a "posh" apartment on St. Peter Street (where Shaw had evidently moved after selling the Dauphine house). The man was said to be a "close friend." He is also said to have been a Marine Major named John [Donald?] Dooty, according to Steve Tyler.

by Marty M.?)

Billy still insisted Shaw had a wife and son.* He also contended that Garrison was gay himself -- liked boys and was envious of Shaw's success with young men. He said Garrison's alleged mistress, stripper Linda Brigitte, was just a front. Billy went on to discuss how Shaw was involved in drugs; how he got drugs for Oswald who was a "druggie" and also a hustler.

"Did you ever hear Clay Shaw referred to as Clay Bertrand, Billy?"

"No. But it wouldn't surprise me that he had an alias."

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He went on to say that once the Mafia (?) beat up Shaw and pulled out his fingernails to punish him or to get information. The man who told him this was Herman Johnson, ("no relation to me") now living in Grand Bay, Mississippi. "Just check Information for his phone and address. He was a waiter in the French Quarter, who is now a retired cop from the force in Mobile. He knows a lot. Want to visit him? We could."

"Did you, by chance, know a Raymond Broshears?"

"No. Who was he?"

"Friend . . . lover of David Ferrie."

"Oh, I knew Ferrie. Didn't like him. He was a con artist. Couldn't stand to be around him. Friend of Archie Bland. "David Ferrell," he said, "was also a real artist. Did mosaics and paintings of women and flowers." Then he made a major leap, sequeing in with, "You know I had high standards

* A friend suggested that at the time [as well as today] famous men had "family cover" for their homosexuality. It has also occurred to me that Shaw might have told the young hustler this to appear more "straight," "bi" . . . whatever.

in the people I associated with. You would be surprised. Take Calvin Klein for example. He's married, but he's gay -- leather freak. He always "gave head" when he was in the Quarter." *

He then proceeded to make a leap backwards, repeating how terrified Archie Bland is, how he is hiding from the world, and urging me to talk with Helen Vanderbilt, a rich woman living on St. Charles St. [no phone listing] who knows Archie's story; knows all about Archie. [Another leap.] "Now Archie Ferrell was a hit man connected with the Chicago mob. Wore a 'jacket' with polka dots which came down to wrists and knees." He repeats the bit about the National Enquirer cover. He thinks he was David Ferrie's brother. [Since Billy left N.O. immediately following the Assassination, maybe a lot of this is coming secondhand from Marty Marcello in Atlanta.]

Billy set off briefly on another strange tack. "You know how people will talk in their sleep about things they keep hidden in the daytime? Well, one night I got Archie Bland to talk in his sleep by whispering in his ear, and he said he had turned Clay Shaw in to the police. He also said he had seen the shooter Archie and Shaw together on occasion."

Then, I asked him to describe the bright, conversational, Marxist, Russian-speaking Lee Harvey Oswald he said he had known. He looked at me and said, "OK. Is your pencil ready? He spoke with a certain warmth and affection, responding without pause: "Oswald had beautiful deer eyes, olive com

* Coincidentally, in a Sept. 11, Newsweek I had brought to N.O. with me (p. 63), was an article on the new Klein "kiddie porn" ads, where I found the following: "He won't answer questions about his personal life, or about last year's unauthorized biography Obsession, which chronicled Klein's alleged homosexual liaisons and fast living."

plexion, weighed 110 pounds, 5'6", black . . . no, dark brown hair, thin face, tiny little hands, small body; he was always grubby and had a little bit of beard [could this have been Billy Seymour?]. He was a Marxist. Lived on the third floor of a house at St. Ann and Burgundy with his wife and three children [could there have been a second Oswald "family"?]. She had had one miscarriage -- out in the courtyard of the house. The owner of The Good Friends Bar is current owner of that house [confirmed]. Oswald spoke Russian. His wife was Russian. He hustled to make money for the family. Into heroin. A weak kind of guy." [Can you by any stretch of the imagination see Oswald, the super neat, "bullnecked" Marine of the Service and Russian photos, as this man?]

Billy said he wasn't working now. Retired. Has been living with his current lover for two years and would have to get home soon because his friend would worry. But he did launch into a kind of disjointed story about how the CIA and Mafia had tried to kill him, because he knew too much. Once, when he was in Charity Hospital in New Orleans, they tried to inject him with a needle. But he managed to get away and came back to Mississippi. He also claimed a big German named Dole (Doyle? couldn't remember the full name, but Archie Bland knows him), who was in the bushes at the Assassination, once slipped him a Mickey Finn and he had a near-fatal automobile accident.

I then ran some names by him -- young men who had been associated with David Ferrie. Did he know any of them? [i.e. Alan Beauboeuf, Coffey, Martens, etc.] He didn't know any of them. "But," he added, "David Ferrie liked to get fucked. I hated him. He was crazy, off the wall. He was on dope. Ferrie, Shaw, and Archie Bland were all masochistic."

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He now began to get ready to leave. We walked up the hill. He said he would be happy to come to Pensacola sometime and talk with several of us re-searching the Assassination. I encouraged him to call collect at any time. We shook hands and I watched him drive off, noting this time his license plate -- MISSISSIPPI HWN-989.*

* Around September 23, I had a call from "Billy Johnson" recorded on my answering machine. No message.
